

ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

A “New to You” View

(Abridged Edition)

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Note on the abridged edition

This abridged edition sets forth the main concepts and ideas of the original edition published by **Trafford Publishing in 2006**. This précis was undertaken by the author who accepts sole responsibility for its content.

This abridged edition does not contain the Addendum in the original entitled: "Integrating Eco-Philosophy and Theology: The Thought of George Tyrrell (1861-1909)."

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Preface

The ideas and notions presented here for discussion are, in fact, not new. They have been discussed for a very long time. They may appear “new to you” as a thinker exploring, for the first time, or continuing to explore, the philosophical relationships that give meaning to our life in the cosmos. Whatever “newness” there is in this book arises in the reader’s subjective awareness or consciousness of what the mind has come to apprehend in place of its previous understanding. The reader may find much that is familiar in this book but at the same time will be presented with a re-casting of the ideas that call for a new conception of those ideas and offer the possibility of a new interpretation of philosophical understanding.

The purpose of this little book is to view critically the dialectic between two disciplines: philosophy and theology. Dialectic is the art of discussion that involves the asking of questions and the giving of answers as first practiced by Socrates. This book presents a point of departure for reflection for the reader. A long tradition of human reflection records the dialectical relationship between philosophy and theology. By reflecting upon human life and experience in the context of a philosophical and theological relationship humanity has learned something of the divine.

Those readers looking for an exhaustive treatment of the philosophical and theological disciplines will not find in this book. Those seeking to discount, debunk or replace theology with a secular philosophy will be disappointed. Conversely, those who seek to defend philosophy as a God-given but human wisdom supported through theological revelation will also be disappointed. The aim of this book is not to debunk, defend or criticize either discipline. It is to examine the relationship between philosophy and theology and thereby to develop an understanding that gives meaning to human activity.

The reflections in this book represent my personal rendering of the dialectical relationship between philosophy and theology that makes life humanly and spiritually enriching. It is my hope that in these reflections others will discover for themselves, through their own personal experience, that life which is humanly and spiritually enriching. To that end I invite the readers to put aside, for the time being at least, all inherited opinions about philosophy and theology and ponder the relationships that I present here only when our thinking becomes intentionally self-reflective it set us on our way to knowledge that illuminates our place in the cosmos.

Gathering the ideas from a variety of authors whom I have read over the years I have grafted their ideas on to my own understanding. Readers who are familiar with the writings and thought of Freidrich von Hügel, Albert Schweitzer, David Rasmussen, Ken Wilber, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Marx will recognize their ideas grafted into this presentation of ecological philosophy and Christian theology. This book enquires into the unity of ecological philosophy and Christian theology. In this unity a critically thinking humanity may come to see its purpose as congruent with the *élan vital* of

evolution and that human meaning is part of a larger emergent meaning within the cosmos.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY?

1.1 The key to understanding ecological philosophy

The ideas discussed here are a part of an emerging ecological philosophy. Ecological philosophy, construed broadly, is an intended Ecological philosophy, construed broadly, is an intended friendly approach to the environment and knowing why; it intends to be friendly with other forms of creation, living and inert, and knowing why. Further, it intends to be friendly with our own minds and bodies and knowing why. Ecological philosophy is a rich philosophical system with its own understanding of metaphysics, epistemology and theology. It is a philosophy of becoming, not being, in which evolution is at the center of its development. In short, ecological philosophy is a new philosophy which is holistic and ecologically sensitive, relevant to life and which can be used for healing the planet and healing ourselves.

Where does the key to understanding ecological philosophy lie? If we examine the global ecological situation from a philosophical perspective, we recognize that the key to understanding an ecological philosophy lies in the philosophical reconstruction of our involvement with the total environment. A conscious philosophical reconstruction aims at ending the exploitation of one part of the ecological system by another and at directing the efforts of society towards an intentional and sustainable interaction with the total environment.

We live in a time when the relationship between philosophy and science

is changing. The sciences have separated themselves from the need for a uniform view of the cosmos and no longer insist upon shaping their methodologies in light of this uniform view. That is, they no longer shape their methodology presuming that a simple, non-compounded and fixed purpose or goal unites the cosmos. They are embracing an ecological point of view. Ecological philosophy does not compartmentalize knowledge but addresses the entire domain of human knowledge comprising all components of the environment in a holistic relationship. Without ecological philosophy, no becoming is possible; without becoming, no material and spiritual evolution of the cosmos occurs.

It profits us nothing, however, to attempt an uncritical return to the perspective of classical philosophy, but it does profit us to turn critically to ecological philosophy; nor, does it profit us to follow uncritically and blindly any new-age philosophy but it does profit us to embrace a specifically new philosophy with open eyes concerning philosophy and science.

Science is the ceaseless seeking of knowledge, the restating of facts, and the discovery of error in order to substitute in our understanding something nearer the truth. The entire point of an ecological philosophical perspective to science is to ensure that philosophers do not impose their own value system on scientific thinking. Rather, ecological philosophers simply demonstrate, or disclose, in a non-invasive and hermeneutic (interpretive) fashion, an awareness of the relationships among the constituents of the environment.

Steady scientific and technical progress has caused an unprecedented growth in our interactive relationships with our environment and vice versa.

We have built societies that continue to alter, either negatively or positively, our inherited environment. We are now literally capable of moving mountains, reversing rivers, creating new seas, and transforming huge deserts into fertile oases. In general, we are in a position to interact with our environment without limit, radically remaking the ecological context. However, we cannot and must not interact with our environment without self-imposed restrictions, without being prepared to compensate for the possible negative consequences of our activities. The more deeply and widely we interact with our environment and manage its components, the more certainly we begin to recognize that we cannot treat our environment as an inexhaustible treasure house without caring how it is altered.

As philosophers of science strive to reach a rationale to express all knowledge of the finite and contingent, both philosophers and theologians feel the call to organize all these scientific and philosophical movements into one worldview. The philosophical approach to ecology reflects more and more a synthesis, or integration, of previously separated areas of scientific knowledge and social practice. Philosophical knowledge and technical science are now jointly taking our environmental interests more seriously into account. They become increasingly concerned for the preservation of the environment through all possible means.

1.2 The subject-matter of ecological philosophy

Ecology, like many other scientific terms, has two different senses. In the first sense, ecology means the process or activity of interactive relationships within the environment. In the second, it means the theoretical

scientific discipline itself. The context determines the intended sense. An ecological philosophy is essential in understanding a systems approach to life. This is so since every system is objectively related; in fact, an ecosystem is composed of various elements or sub-systems acting in relation to or in the context of all other elements, or sub-systems, that make up the ecosphere. Given this understanding, each element may be conceived as a system and each system may function as an element in a broader system.

Ecological philosophy ponders the conditions of existence of living organisms and the mutual relations between organisms and the world they inhabit. Charles Darwin's conception of the evolution of species encourages the notion of an ecological philosophy. Within his thinking, natural selection plays an important role in an ecological philosophy. The concept of natural selection claims that the interactive relationship between a species and its habitat is one of the primary factors governing biological evolution. In 1866, Ernst Haeckel, while studying the evolutionary character of natural selection, proposed the term *oecology* to describe his study. Oecology, or ecology, comes from the Greek, οἶκος, meaning house, dwelling or habitat.

When a new understanding of the environment is experienced there often follows a new construction of an ecological philosophical stance towards the environment. Hardly anything has a more urgent claim on us today than this. Only when we conceive ourselves at home in the cosmos and not estranged from it can we create a cooperative society reflecting the unity of the experience of being at home. However, an ecological philosophical stance is far from a homogeneous understanding and does not always reveal the sources out of which it has been constructed. If we look around us, or if we

analyze our own selves, we find many types of activity. We find an interaction, a tension, a giving and taking, a hostility and a friendship. We also experience a bridging and a breaking between the material and the mental, between the present and the past, and between the individual and the collective. We find claims of our bodies on our minds and claims of our minds upon our bodies. As well, we find the claims of other personalities or of our own personalities upon our present condition and disposition. Finally, we experience the claims of our own individuality upon the family or society or nation, race, or church to which we belong.

Within an ecological philosophy we organize ourselves not only as social creatures but also as intellectual ones. As a result of this organization the alteration of the environment is effected by our intentional activity. An ecological philosophy that is the basis for an intentional evolution of our environment examines the relationships of all social activity. Ecological philosophy ponders the environment qualitatively. Ecological philosophy brings about changes in the technology and philosophical thinking of our existing socio-political relationships. To think *sub specie machinae* replaces the view of the infallible God as well as the view of fallible humanity. Technology belongs to our being as much as eating, breathing, and thinking. The important thing is to learn from technology an expanded way of living.

However, an ecological philosophy that keeps contact with reality must look objectively to the cosmos. The cosmos existed long before we came upon it. Concerning our future, Albert Schweitzer remarked, "Who knows but

that the earth will circle round the sun once more without man upon it?"¹ We must, therefore, not place ourselves at the center of the cosmos, but understand ourselves in relation to it, somewhat as artists experience their place within modern technology, somewhat as participants in an all-embracing activity that develops our abilities. We need to remember that all significant pre-Christian philosophers, especially those of ancient Greece, regarded life as an art, and science only as the theory of that art.

1.3 Methodology in ecological philosophy

Here, I discuss some of the basic methodological principles of an ecological philosophy. These principles are rooted in scientific knowledge and social activity or praxis. Scientific knowledge and social activity deepen our understanding of an ecological philosophy and help shape a more effective strategy for environmental interaction. The basic principle is that of dialectics. By relying on dialectics, we can distinguish the evolution of our social relationships, from their simplest to their highest forms. We can further distinguish the self-organized, objective patterns of interaction of a society and of the individual. The dialectical principle is a most useful philosophical principle in disclosing the unity of the social sciences and the environment.

It is important for us to realize that our consciousness does not embrace reality fully and cannot alter or abolish the objective patterns of nature, society, or formation of the human personality. Nor can our consciousness alter its own patterns of coming to awareness, functioning,

¹ *The Spiritual Life: Selected Writings of Albert Schweitzer* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1996).

and developing. These patterns operate objectively and independently whether they are recognized or not. The general course of events always contains elements of the conscious and the unconscious, the realized and unrealized, the foreseen and unforeseen, in a historically changing relationship. The participation of our consciousness and the facts of experience condition our intentional activity, creating a greater role in society for consciousness and for its relationship with the environment. We account for a creative role in society through the two disciplines of the existential and spiritual life; philosophy and theology. Each gives to and takes from the other. Moreover, the single human consciousness relates to and includes both philosophy and theology.

The emergence of a holistic view of life within our present experience challenges theology to face the issue of joining with philosophy in raising our consciousness through a phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological methodology discloses the necessity of the notion of co-creation within the environment. The methodology of ecological phenomenological philosophy involves the creative notion of holism in the integration of life sustaining values within the human subjective consciousness.

1. 4 The design of an ecological philosophy

Our interactive life is constantly changing, extending and perfecting itself within our environment. Overall, one can note that our invasive interaction upon the environment is disclosing the variety of its life forms. This variety arises from the fact that in its beginnings life is not consciously

experienced as a unity but as a multiplicity. We live with a number of social, theoretical, ethical, and moral purposes whose conscious unity is not our starting point but rather our intended goal which is, in fact, our pre-reflective consciousness. Ecological philosophy, in order to free itself from the constraints of the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, finds it necessary both to understand life itself and to conceive an anthropology that re-constructs the modern subject in terms that are essentially different from those of the Middle Ages. A Marxist interpretation of the subject in the modern social environment is one such example of the design of an ecological philosophy.

In designing an ecological philosophy based on our experience, the question arises: Do we need to return to nature as experienced in its pre-scientific state? The notion that we need to return to pre-scientific experience is not new and is, in fact, quite common. The high degree of interest in new age spiritualities is an example of this. This desire to return to pre-scientific experience may be interpreted in various ways. With hindsight, we see that ecological philosophy has passed through various evolutionary phases. Among them was Darwinism. Darwinism, as a philosophy, gave rise to an evolutionary understanding of the environment. It conceived the content of ecological philosophy to be the evolutionary science of relationships of an organism with its environment; the same attitude has characterized the biological sciences to the present day. Darwinism, in its various expressions, understood the human population as a purely biological and social phenomenon within an environment. Marxism presented a social scientific phase in the evolutionary understanding of the patterns of society's interaction with the environment. These patterns

identified the human population as a materialistic, social, and biological phenomenon, a conception distinct from that of Darwin's evolutionary perspective.

For it to function as an epistemological system, one has to understand ecological phenomenological philosophy in a double sense. First, ecological philosophy discloses the expression of an integrated understanding of the subject's own experience. Second, an ecological philosophy is but part of the whole of our collective experiential outlook. In its design, an ecological phenomenological philosophy takes into account both senses.

1.5 The normative character of ecological philosophy

Ecological philosophy constitutes a normative, or ethical, character of human activity. An phenomenological philosophical stance, or way of interpreting experience, provides for thresholds that disclose further knowledge and meaning of ethical social activity. We formalize, in our thinking, such thresholds that arise within our experience because only then will the intended purpose of our actions be recognized. Much formal Western philosophizing is preoccupied with the discussion of secondary issues. It has lost touch with the elemental and existential questions regarding life and the world, becoming theoretical and finding satisfaction in discussing problems of a purely academic nature. Our Western philosophy has occupied itself with elucidating itself, instead of struggling to achieve a cosmic view that would lead to real change in the environment and in ourselves. Western thought has not been governed by the notion that the one thing needful is the relational unity of ourselves with the cosmos. Rather, it has emphasized

the dichotomy between the cosmos and ourselves. We are, thus, in danger of being satisfied with lowered ideals and with an inferior conception of the cosmos.

To prevent satisfaction with lowered ideals and an inferior conception of the cosmos ecological philosophy has an important role to play in the development of society. An ecological philosophy discloses a norm of integrity within both the individual and society, so that neither the individual nor society reduces to the particular terms of the other. Within an ecological philosophy, we realize that all the sciences freely admit that their normative disclosures of reality are subject to reconstruction. In addition, within an ecological philosophy both philosophy itself and theology might admit to a final good or end that has always managed to elude, but not falsify, their formulations.

Normative development arises quite naturally within an ecological philosophy due to the possibility of transforming the reality around us. An ecological philosophy transcends the constraints of Hellenistic thought, providing further thresholds for development and philosophical criticism. Transcending Hellenistic constraints represents a new stage in the evolution of human thought. Ecological philosophical evolution is an extremely complicated and many-sided activity requiring a restructuring of our understanding of the environment and social restructuring of its components. In place of classical analytically constructed thought, phenomenological thinking discloses the intended purposes of social and ethical development.

Within the normative character of an ecological philosophy, various

questions arise. Shall I relate only to myself and not care for others? Shall I like only my kind and dislike all other kinds? Attend only to humans and ignore other species? Attend only to sentient beings and thereby omit that which is divine? It is becoming apparent to enlightened thinkers that ecological philosophy, along with knowledge derived of spirituality, gives us a chance to add a dimension of depth, growth, and development to these questions arising within our environment.

1.6 Critical understanding in ecological philosophy

During human history, significant crises have arisen more than once in our relationships within the cosmos. Further, in recent decades, qualitative shifts have occurred in our relationships within the environment. Today we have reached several critical points in areas affecting the environment, such as water and air pollution, greenhouse gases, and sustainability of resources. The present ecological context presents a unique opportunity for the critical understanding of the environment. A critical understanding of modern society discloses opportunities for improved relationships with our environment; philosophical contemplation has an influence on the construction of the social and existential systems that form these relationships. Therefore, it is expedient for us to contemplate the subject-object relation in more detail from a phenomenological perspective. It is also very important to understand as phenomena the processes of our interaction with the environment and to develop methods for a comprehensive and fundamentally new approach to the future. One aspect of this assessment is to contemplate the dynamics of the environment as organism and the

transformation therein caused by human intervention. In that connection, it is no accident that some people talk of a new philosophical revolution aimed at taking into greater account the ecological principles of development beyond the biological sciences.

The need to understand our phenomenological connection with the environment is beginning to take hold of the Western mind. Philosophers realize that the principles of an ecological phenomenological understanding of the environment depend on the social conditions that satisfy the spiritual and ecological needs of the individual. In this context, we can distinguish the collective mind from the singular mind. Our collective mind is crafted out of the activity of singular minds. The collective mind continues a dialectic with itself, as well as with the singular mind; this dialectic constitutes part of our cosmic environment.

However, the collective mind of the public and the singular mind of the individual may intend good or ill. In the human existential context, we find only one true epistemological object, that is, the subject who experiences. Critical understanding in ecological philosophy takes place within the national and economic culture and within other features of the environment. Thus, we are subsequently presented with a considerable variety of philosophical opinions. We then experience a need for further philosophical contemplation to disclose the integrated understanding of ecological philosophy. Such an understanding serves as the basis for a democratic involvement with the environment and, at the same time, deepens our awareness of social consciousness.

The global character of ecological difficulties calls for an intended re-

evaluation of philosophical perspectives on an international scale. Philosophers who remain within the classical metaphysical modes of thinking cannot envision a re-evaluated approach. Not understanding the dialectics of a new philosophical understanding, classical metaphysical thinkers presume the new dialectic to be error and the cause of many epistemological problems. Failing to understand that philosophical thinking was evolving before the scientific era, they have underestimated the potential for a new philosophical point of view arising out of the old point of view. A new philosophical point of view requires a revolution in epistemological thinking, replacing the former, quantitative philosophical thinking with a contemporary, qualitative philosophical thinking. Through the former quantitative philosophical approach we “conquer” nature and sap the natural foundations of our own life by disrupting the interaction between society and the environment. In short, we must evolve out of a scholastic philosophy into phenomenological philosophy.

Our environment stimulates and evokes an intellectual response from philosophers. An intellectual response becomes effective only when apprehended as constant activity or evolution of ideas. The intellectual response is conditioned by the results of the many discussions that have gone on beforehand about the environment. Yet, when critically evaluating any new views and subsequently abandoning inadequate ideas we must not forget that the truth is not exclusively, nor ultimately, apprehended through philosophical understanding. That is why, when trying to solve certain problems, we also have to be extremely critical of our philosophical understanding, treating it only as an opportunity for further reflection.

Philosophical thresholds of understanding reveal themselves only over the course of the ages and then only to individuals who have been experiencing and reflecting over generations on what they feel or do. Philosophy, as such, has not been able to do more than evaluate and clarify convictions and find within its own domain certain limitations and requirements that tend to emerge from and converge towards a critical consensus.

1.7 A phenomenological understanding of ecological philosophy

Since Descartes, Western philosophers have divided our environment into parts and elements in order to understand it more conveniently. They contrast and compare one part with another so that what appears as a total understanding will satisfy the inquirer. Today, however, it is necessary to study our environment not through compartmentalizing it, but by apprehending it holistically and interpreting the knowledge gained of it with the intent to understand the immanent and transcendent relationships of all its constituent parts. In that respect, it is reasonable to ask what philosophical stance or approach may become the point of departure for an integrating ecological philosophy. A phenomenological approach is the answer. The methodology of a phenomenological approach leads us to understand our experience from a coaxial perspective. We must interpret our experience with respect to both the vertical and horizontal perspectives, as it were, of the appearance of our environment. Truth is disclosed through a phenomenological knowledge of a coaxial subjective and objective world.

A phenomenological apprehension rejects a metaphysical dichotomy or ontological separation between subject and object. Ontologically, subject

and object are distinguishable but not separable. A relational unity of subject and object appears within their environment through a phenomenological apprehension. A relational unity discloses human life within a unity of the highest form of social existence in an ecological system.

The most important principle of a phenomenological ecological philosophy is the interaction between that which is perceived as subject and that which is conceived as object in dialectical relationship. We must understand this dialectic as enveloping process, rather than as static and fixed state of affairs. In this conception, interactivity necessarily constitutes the unity of the social life and the environment within the cosmos. We shall not resolve our philosophical and environmental problems by blotting out the dualism we experience within our universe, but only by conceiving our relationships as a unity that no longer has any divisive or dichotomous power over or within our experience. In other words, from a phenomenological perspective, we conceive ourselves to be at home in the universe and as co-creating constituents of the universe.

1.8 Humanitarianism and ecological philosophy

The necessity of a humanitarian view of the world emerges from our experience of the environment as the place in which the needs and the aspirations of humanity, both individually and collectively, enter our consciousness. Because of technical advancement, the material world that constitutes our environment has already become the product of humanity's activity. This transformation of the environment by means of modern technique demonstrates the necessity to balance the factors of humanity's

physical, social, inner, and transcendental world. This balancing or harmonization of relationships is one of the most important aspects of modern humanitarianism. Our relationship within the environment occupies a major place among the philosophical issues of contemporary research. However, no matter how great the significance of the material environment is to us, we must not underestimate the importance of the transcendental aspect of our environment. The disclosure of the transcendental aspect of our environment is truly of global significance.

The transcendental aspect of our environment not only concerns our individual intellectual and emotional outlook; it also embraces all the collective forms of relationships beginning with the family, through all types of communities, all gradations of social levels, classes, nations, states, and countries that regulate human activity. Humanitarian philosophers pay much attention to what Western thinkers sometimes call the identity crisis, that is, our loss of a sense of our place in a modern, constantly changing world and a loss of our own self-esteem and intrinsic value. We are faced with the danger of forgetting something that is, ultimately, a most important point. When surveying global problems affecting the broad population and even humanity as a whole, it is the single person, the unique personality, which must be considered as primary.

Ecological philosophy is often directed to the external environment, with a concern for the preservation of the environment. Nevertheless, life calls our attention to an “inner medium” of the human personality and to the deeper aspects of community life in order to discover how to avoid the disasters that often threaten our environment. In the search for the most effective forms of

philosophical understanding, our attention is naturally concentrated on problems affecting the masses of people. The attention given by philosophers to epistemology has a long history. Their attention to epistemology is complex and varied and takes into account many factors closely interwoven with the issue of human behaviour. Thus we need to think about the individual as he or she relates to the transcendental dimension within the cosmos. The ecological philosophical crisis is of special concern to epistemology.

What do we mean by saying that human reason makes life better and transcendently richer? One may say that it is a matter of our understanding of our own identity in relationship to our environment. A proper understanding of human identity, which is the illuminative purpose of all philosophies, will resolve the root conflicts within all our interactions and the conflicts within our environment. In other words, it is in understanding our place in the finite collection of things in the cosmos that human reason makes life better and transcendently richer. We humans resemble, but differ from, other things in the environment. Identity is the understanding of our significance in the context of our existence. Identity issues arise from individuals and the group within the environment. Identity, as disclosed by ecological philosophy, is not an ultimate, nor a self-subsisting notion. Rather, it is the notion of an evolving, living subject, a becoming, not a being. Identity, for humans, arises from the self-reflexive activity of the individual in the environment, or in transcendental activity, or both. The phenomenological philosophical disclosure of human identity leaves no room for a transcendental vacuum. Human identity serves as the basis of life and a unique positive personality of true worth. Thus, the

task of an epistemological ecological philosophy is to make a deep unprejudiced evaluation and to seek ways of overcoming any cause that may result in de-personalization and de-identification resulting in a socially and transcendently impoverished existence. Failing to undertake this humanitarian evaluation leads to an identity crisis and to despair and self-annihilation.

1.9 The philosophical evolution of ecological awareness

To some, philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways; however, according to Marx in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach, the point is to change the world. This point is a new posing of the ecological problem. The Marxist perspective has had revolutionary significance in developing new views of the relation of society to the environment. To my mind, its importance is yet unrealized.

The notion of an ecological philosophy has evolved comparatively recently. Global ecology and social ecology have become contemporary expressions of our concern and are among the most publicly recognized global issues of modern times. We have become aware of the significance of ecological issues as the planet has ceased to be an unlimited absorber of the wastes of industry. Signs of irreversible degeneration in the environment began to appear as the scale and intensity of abuse of the environment increased. For many of us, this has turned our attention to the

dialectical principles uniting the social life and the environment, and to an effort to revise and improve our social relationship with the environment.

A phenomenological understanding of the evolution of ecological relations between society and the environment discloses the proper pattern of the interaction of subject and object in the cosmos. Humans engage in the highest form of reasonable activity known to us, that is, in social activity.

In a cosmos that discloses an inter-subjective transcendental our physical environment is at a lower level in the hierarchy of the forms of activity. With this realization in mind, the French paleontologist and Christian evolutionist, Teilhard de Chardin, remarked that if humanity had had unlimited opportunities to spread and settle from the very beginning its development would have been something unimaginable. The thresholds of interaction of humanity within the cosmos need to include a transcendent understanding. Thresholds of interaction that include a transcendent understanding present the possibilities to establish goals and promote the evolution of our human activity.

1.10 The socio-cultural origin of ecological awareness

Philosophers trained in the socio-cultural philosophical systems of their day have reflected upon the relations between humanity and the environment. The building up of practical philosophical systems based on the thinking of René Descartes and the use of philosophical principles of understanding introduced by Francis Bacon furthered science's dominant position in the environmental system of connections and relationships. The French materialistic thinkers, when analyzing the relationship between

humanity and the environment, often based their thinking on the anthropological and ontological notions of Ludwig Feuerbach, Immanuel Kant, and Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Their contributions introduced into philosophical thought various forms of the idea that an abiding universal divinity unites humanity and the environment.

The attempt at integrating scientific knowledge and art in order to satisfy the individual's social and spiritual needs pre-dates contemporary philosophy. Integrating scientific knowledge and art for this purpose continues within ecological philosophy. Ecological philosophy, enriched by a dialectical approach, discloses the vertical and horizontal elements of the structure of knowledge. This philosophical approach makes it possible to make a critical evaluation and to understand the environment in a manner appropriate to any given culture. Through a coaxial understanding of vertical and horizontal knowledge, we can carry out a global program to create integrating principles within modern cultures and their environment. Historically, by the 1980s a reciprocal relationship between ecology and culture was becoming more and more understood and accepted. Through an awareness of their reciprocal relationship, we have come to understand the totality of spiritual and social values uniting this relational entity. Through a holistic understanding of this unity, which is greater and other than the sum of its individual parts, the environmental systems act as a complex set of socio-cultural processes within the ecological context.

1.11 Summary

Our contemporary experience confirms that an understanding ecology cannot do without a re-evaluation of philosophical and scientific methodologies. The entire point of an ecological philosophical re-evaluation is that philosophers not impose their own value systems upon the environment. The philosophical approach to ecology increasingly reflects a synthesis, or integration, of the previously separated areas of the experience of scientific knowledge and social practice. A profound evolutionary difference looms between an ecological philosophy that helps one comprehend the environment and an ecological philosophy that helps one transform the environment.

Ecological philosophy ponders the conditions of existence of living organisms and the mutual relations between organisms and the world they inhabit. Ecological philosophy takes the stance that no single interpretation of reality can compel a rational consensus of all minds, and that philosophy cannot convincingly support a single value system. Within an ecological philosophical stance, we organize ourselves not only as social creatures but also as intellectual ones. An ecological philosophy that keeps contact with reality must look objectively to the cosmos. We do need, as well, to experience ourselves somewhat subjectively as artists within modern technology and somewhat as participants in an all-embracing activity that develops our abilities.

Theology has need of the phenomenological methodology of ecological philosophy as its methodology so that theology may become conscious of its true purpose. A phenomenological methodology discloses

the central notion of co-creation within the environment. Ecological phenomenological philosophy, as a methodology, involves the creation of wholeness, the integration of life sustaining values within the human subjective consciousness. Ecological philosophy finds it necessary both to understand life itself and to conceive an anthropology that re-constructs the modern subject in terms essentially different from those of the middle Ages. Depending upon the epistemology, the development of an understanding of the depth and the mystery, the drama and the pathos, and the spirituality of the whole experience of life, of the world and of God, will vary accordingly.

Philosophers realize that the principles of an ecological phenomenological understanding of the environment depend on social conditions that satisfy both the spiritual and temporal needs of the individual. The global character of ecological difficulties calls for an intentional re-evaluation of philosophical perspectives on an international scale. The whole human intellectual enterprise hangs on how we relate to experiential facts and offer an appropriate philosophical interpretation.

A relational unity of subject and object is disclosed within their environment through a phenomenological apprehension. The most important principle of a phenomenological ecological philosophy is the interaction between subject and object in a dialectical relationship. In other words, from a phenomenological perspective we conceive ourselves to be at home in the universe and as co-creating constituents of the universe.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

2.1 A phenomenological eco-philosophical approach

One intended purpose of an ecological philosophy, or eco-philosophy, as I speak of it in this chapter, is to construct methods of thinking that will assist us in our understanding of the activity of the spirit in the world. An eco-philosophy attends to the transcendental, the spiritual, as well as to the material aspects of our environment. Traditionally, in the West, the scholastic philosophical method, or some variation of it, has been used to evaluate our transcendental or spiritual experience. In modern times, however, other interpretive options have become available, such as the phenomenological method. Scholastic philosophy is no longer the primary supporter of theology in the interpretation of the cosmos. The sciences have become partners in the interpretive dialogue with theology and their particular methods have had to be considered in the interpretation of the environment. It is now phenomenology's turn to become a partner in the interpretive dialogue.

A phenomenological eco-philosophical approach is increasingly preferred by many in interpreting their experiences. A phenomenological method of interpretation is qualitatively different from the scholastic method of interpretation in that phenomenological interpretation apprehends authentic notions of personal subjective consciousness in contrast to absolute ideals. A phenomenological methodology does not merely apprehend a theoretical pre-understanding. When supported by a scholastic philosophy, theology is required to conceptualize its mental objects as

epistemological ideals susceptible to a pre-understanding. But when supported by a phenomenological eco-philosophy, on the other hand, theology is required to inquire into the subjective meaning of religious experience and presence in the world. Such inquiry into subjective meaning is not limited to the description of religious experience and presence, but is an acknowledgment of that which is transcendent and spiritual in all experience. Phenomenological apprehension is particular to the agent and, thus, not bound to the objective intellectual constructs of any single culture but is characterized by the cultural context of the agent. Modernism, as an identifiable Western intellectual construct, has provided a phenomenological threshold for such philosophical interpretation. In their respective approaches, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger sought ways of philosophical understanding that would be more authentic in giving meaning to human experience than traditional Western metaphysics. In the theological inquiry below, I suggest a phenomenological eco-philosophical approach that engages the subject's immediate, total and holistic perception of the environment.

2. 2 An eco-philosophical theological inquiry

A phenomenological eco-philosophical theological inquiry concerns itself with the notion of becoming, an evolutionary term, more than with the

notion of being, a scholastic term, in the interpretation of experience. In a dialectical manner, it concerns itself with these notions of being and becoming simultaneously. However, such an inquiry about being and becoming is not a philosophical metaphysics of the type that has been elsewhere described as the “Queen of the Sciences.”² Rather, the intention of phenomenological theological inquiry, according to Laycock, is to reach “God without God,” a phrase coined by Husserl.³

Phenomenological theological inquiry interprets a present, pre-reflective human experience in a manner similar to the way in which poets and artists interpret experience. The style of theological interpretation adopted by the phenomenological method of apprehension reflects an existential, not an idealistic, approach to life. Sören Kierkegaard was among the first to initiate this style of inquiry into life’s experiences. Other philosophers have had similar thoughts. J. G. Fichte, W. J. Schelling, Martin Heidegger, G. W. F. Hegel, L. Feuerbach, K. Marx, and F. Nietzsche also adopted an existential approach in their philosophical inquiries.

The scholastic method of philosophy was common to both Roman Catholic and Anglican theology. Daniel Liderbach tells us that Modernists insisted upon the importance of apprehended phenomena as the starting point to describe and interpret the givenness of experience.⁴ George Tyrrell (1861-1909) and Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) are significant representatives of Modernist theological thinking and their work consisted of an existential

² Etienne Gilson, “On Behalf of the Handmaid,” in *Renewal of Religious Thought*, ed. L. K. Shook (Montreal: Palm, 1968).

³ “Introduction: Toward an Overview of Phenomenological Theology,” in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, ed. Stephen William Laycock and James G. Hart (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 1-22.

⁴ “Modernism in the Roman Church,” *Explorations: Journal for Adventurous Thought* 20 (2001): 17-36.

evaluation of the expressions of religious understanding appropriate to their day. Within the Anglican tradition, the Modernist theologians were known as “modern churchmen” and the most influential among them were H. D. A. Major and W. R. Inge. Cyril Garbett has noted that large numbers of the churchmen of the day regarded the claims of Christianity as inconsistent with modern ways of thought. Phrases like *the Fatherhood of God*, *Salvation through Christ*, and *Life after Death* seemed to them to have been meaningless platitudes.⁵ New theological understandings based on a new philosophy needed to be constructed to prepare the way for the future of belief. In the future, and for some of us today, belief must take on the new form of an existential phenomenological eco-philosophy characterized by Leslie Dewart’s notion of de-Hellenization.⁶

Theological de-Hellenization reflects an apprehension of experience through a phenomenological activity that has replaced the scholastic method of interpretation. As such, de-Hellenization presents a new threshold of activity in theological interpretation. Unfortunately, philosophical de-Hellenization has been discounted and subsequently abandoned by many thinkers within Western philosophy. As a result, many of us have missed the opportunity to encounter a new threshold of theological inquiry typified by the Modernist movement. In scholastic thinking, theoretical questions and answers are formulated and governed by a Hellenized and fixed idea of nature and being.

The approaches of the various philosophical schools of thought are culturally and historically identifiable. That is, schools of philosophical thought have evolved. They are a product of their times and environment.

⁵ *The Claims of the Church of England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947).

⁶ Armand Maurer, “Dewart’s De-Hellenization of Belief in God,” *The Ecumenist* 5 (1967): 22-25.

Philosophical terms change to reflect a new apprehension within the historical development in epistemology. By way of example, in phenomenological thought, *existence*, which is a classical term, is re-conceived in terms of *becoming*. *Union*, a classical term, is re-conceived as *unity*, a relational term; *necessity*, a classical term, is replaced by the phenomenological notion of *freedom*.

Theologians continually search for new and meaningful ways to understand religious experience. No hidden or ideal meanings are disclosed in phenomenological theological language which assists in the interpretation of experience. Notions come into form only in light of the subject's intent. John Morreall concludes that appealing to hidden meaning in theological language is a negative undertaking since no hidden meanings exist. Our words are based on our intentions and if theological language is possible then theological intentions must also be possible. We should not spend our time trying to appeal to hidden meanings that do not exist in theological language. ⁷ Rather than attempt to identify hidden meanings, phenomenological theological thinking attributes religious meaning to phenomena. Phenomenological theology is thus freed from all allegorical limitations in its language. That the phenomenological method presents new thresholds for theological inquiry can be demonstrated to philosophers and theologians, but whether phenomenologists of religion have accurately grasped what is demanded by these methods is doubtful. ⁸

Within contemporary thinking, a renaissance is in the making as phenomenological apprehension reveals new thresholds of understanding

⁷ "Can Theological Language Have Hidden Meaning?" *Religious Studies* 19 (1983) 43-56.

⁸ Thomas Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

within Western culture. Thomas Ryba notes that many observers, both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church, make the inference that the church's theology may be on the verge of another grand synthesis that might supplant Thomism.⁹ This grand synthesis would be contingent upon the abandonment of traditional theoretical thinking, according to Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.¹⁰ A way forward for contemporary interpretation, I suggest, is through a phenomenological understanding conceived as an eco-philosophical activity. In what follows, three phenomenological thresholds present an opportunity for the eco-philosophical activity or reflection.

3 An Eco-philosophical reflection: Scholastic interpretation shifts to phenomenological apprehension

According to Langdon Gilkey, in Western theological understanding, debate has moved from the question of the structure of religious language (an issue of scholastic interpretation) to the more radical question of a mode of meaningful discourse (an issue of phenomenological apprehension) in which the interpreter is part of the experience.¹¹ Scholastic theological understanding does not falsify the interpretive task. Rather, scholastic understanding is inadequate for the contemporary interpretive task. Phenomenological theologians continue to look to new apprehensions to replace scholastic ideology. Theological interpretation is undergoing an *aggiornamento*, an up-dating, or better, a *ressourcement*, a return to the sources, and becoming disengaged from a culture that no longer exists as it encounters new thresholds of interpretation. The environment to be

⁹ *The Essence of Phenomenology*, ix.

¹⁰ *Phenomenology and Science in Contemporary European Thought* (New York: Noonday, 1962).

¹¹ *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

interpreted is changing. A co-responsible and co-creative relationship is disclosed in a phenomenological apprehension of this environment. This is significant because persons now may accept themselves as co-responsible and co-creative agents with the divine life. In a scholastic ideology, this understanding of co-creatorship is not tenable. Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a criticism of the scholastic ideology in that Catholic critics wish for things to reveal a God-directed orientation of the world and wish for humanity, like things, to be nothing but a nature heading toward its perfection.¹²

In theology, no hermeneutic, no clear method, no set of rules secures a certainty of apprehension and understanding of religious experience. However, a relational approach suggests participatory activity within phenomenological philosophical apprehension. This participatory activity is the difference between scholastic interpretation and phenomenological apprehension. In phenomenological understanding, the Christian's life-world provides the *theologia crucis* for the religious experience. The *theologia crucis* is an existential threshold for the phenomenological apprehension of experience. For most Western Christians, modernity is the context of the *theologia crucis*, and modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria from the models supplied by another epoch. It creates normativity out of itself.¹³ According to Gordon Kaufman, in the phenomenological existential apprehension of the *theologia crucis*, theology becomes fundamentally an activity of construction and reconstruction, not one of theoretical description or exposition, as it has

¹² *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

ordinarily been understood in scholastic theology.¹⁴

2. 4 Eco-philosophical reflection: Dichotomous knowledge shifts to unitary knowledge

Another threshold of interpretation reveals a philosophical shift in epistemological thinking from a scholastic to a phenomenological way of thinking. Frederick Sontag suggests that when philosophy regains its rightful place, asking questions that no science can determine for it, it becomes less certain, but also more flexible--so that theology can once again utilize its support.¹⁵ In the shift from static, scholastic knowledge to active, participatory knowledge certain terms are not to be confused. Subjectivism and objectivism are terms that denote specific doctrines or systems of knowledge, whereas subjectivity and objectivity are terms that connote a phenomenological and relational apprehension of the life-world or environment. In Western ideology, characteristics modeled after anthropomorphic concepts are predicated of that which is divine. Further, when applied to deity, these predicates are often interpreted as real in the collective mind and as constituting deity *in se*. That such divinity is believed to exist or to be Other, or is understood as an Other, does not reveal anything of the divine construction or even whether God, or gods, exist. In contrast to Western ideology, phenomenological thinking does not present a separate, but common, or detached but universal, objective reality. Scholastic philosophy/ideology posits that a true, absolute being, one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and transcendent, personally exists over and above the temporal world, imparting knowledge to the knower. As a result, in

¹⁴ *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

¹⁵ *The Future of Theology: A Philosophical Basis for Contemporary Protestant Thought* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

scholastic philosophy absolute being lacks the potential for any development or evolution. This contrasts with phenomenological philosophy in which an evolutionary understanding of *becoming* as opposed to absolute *being* is disclosed and relationships are socially intended and constructed rather than imposed and determined by external theoretical categories.

A relational epistemology is an epistemology that discloses a phenomenological existential apprehension of those social and cultural symbols that have not lost their power to convince us, according to Paul Tillich.¹⁶ Since phenomenological apprehension is socially constructed, Gordon Kaufman notes that we must see human existence in terms of these symbolical constructions that form a phenomenological unity, not dichotomous union.¹⁷

2. 5 An eco-philosophical reflection: Idealistic language shifts to participatory language

I follow Willam F. Zuurdeeg's interpretation that theological language is convictional language of a special type.¹⁸ However, for Chris Botha,¹⁹ theological language is not necessarily confessional language. I suggest that theological convictional language is unique due to its participatory, not merely descriptive, character. Further, theological language defies conventional semantics, according to Carl Raschke, and is self-consciously revelatory.²⁰ In identifying the field of participatory theology, Hans Küng tells

¹⁶ *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

¹⁷ *Essay on Theological Method* (1990).

¹⁸ "The Nature of Theological Language," *Journal of Religion* 40 (1960): 1-8.

¹⁹ *The Cave of Adullam or Achor, a Door of Hope? A History of the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1990).

²⁰ *The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1979).

us that it includes common, human, and ambiguous experiences.²¹ Further, Gregory Baum observes that many Christians desire to speak about reality in continuity with ordinary experiences of their lives.²² All this presents an opportunity for us to encounter in our daily lives new thresholds for theological apprehension from an eco-philosophical and phenomenological perspective, not an idealistic one. Charles E. Winquist suggests that apprehending existence through the word of God shifts our idealistic language to a participatory language.²³ Leslie Dewart suggests that the Berkeleian view *esse est percipi* (being is perception) may be rendered *esse est referri* (being is relational) within our contemporary threshold of experience.²⁴ *Esse est referri*, as participatory language, is preferred to *esse est percipi*, which is idealistic language.

2.6 Summary

Scholastic philosophy is no longer the primary supporter of theology in its interpretation of the cosmos. A phenomenological eco-philosophical language is preferred by many to interpret their experiences. A phenomenological eco-philosophical inquiry concerns itself with the notion of *becoming* in the interpretation of experience. Theological de-Hellenization reflects an apprehension of experience through a phenomenological activity that has replaced the scholastic method of interpretation. As such, de-Hellenization presents a new threshold of activity in theological interpretation. Unfortunately, the activity of de-Hellenization has been

²¹ *Theology for the Third Millenium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

²² *Man Becoming: God in Secular Language* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

²³ *The Communion of Possibility* (Chico, Calif.: New Horizons, 1975).

²⁴ *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

discounted and subsequently abandoned by many thinkers within Western philosophy. As a result, many of us have missed the opportunity to encounter a new threshold of theological inquiry typified by the Modernist movement.

Scholastic theological understanding does not falsify the interpretive task. Rather, scholastic understanding is inadequate for the contemporary interpretive task. Phenomenological theologians continue to look to new understandings to replace scholastic ideology. Many Western-educated individuals understand themselves as faithful, co-responsible agents and seek new thresholds for theological inquiry that will express their participatory role in the religious interpretation of the life-world. In theology, no hermeneutic, no clear method, no set of rules secures a certainty of apprehension and understanding of religious experience. However, a relational approach suggests the assurance of participatory activity within a phenomenological philosophical understanding.

Scholastic philosophy/ideology posits that a true, absolute being, one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and transcendent, personally exists over and above the temporal world, imparting knowledge to the knower. Thus, in scholastic philosophy, absolute being lacks the potential for any development or evolution. This contrasts with phenomenological philosophy, in which an evolutionary understanding of *becoming*, as opposed to absolute *being*, is disclosed and relationships are socially intended and constructed rather than imposed and determined by external theoretical categories.